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C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 000579

SIPDIS

STATE FOR DRL/NESCA, NEA/RA AND NEA/MAG

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [MO](#)

SUBJECT: MOROCCO: FOLLOW UP ON THE 2007 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

Classified By: DCM Robert P. Jackson for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

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11. (C) The Country Report on Human Rights Practices has become an increasingly useful tool for promoting improvement in Morocco. Since the release of the Morocco and Western Sahara human rights reports on March 11, the Government of Morocco (GOM), human rights organizations and other diplomats have generally lauded their "balance" and utility. Press reactions to the report and an embassy press release highlighting both progress and problems were generally positive. Activists in the Western Sahara in particular praised them for helping contribute to recent improvements, while calling for still more coverage. However, the Morocco report was also criticized for its "non-existent" treatment of the Amazigh (Berber) issue, and some civil society representatives felt it insufficiently addressed the question of police abuses outside of Western Sahara. Our coordination with the GOM on human rights questions is deepening, due in large part to the human rights report dialogue process. Additionally, to improve drafting efficiency and accuracy, we have instituted several internal administrative measures to help strengthen our ability to track and analyze information and engage more effectively with the GOM during the research and drafting process. End Summary.

Balanced and Useful

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12. (C) Most interlocutors from across the political spectrum lauded the Morocco and Western Sahara Human Rights Reports for their "evenhandedness." Chief of Staff to the Minister of Foreign Affairs Nasser Bourita called the "more even and accurate" reporting of the past two years a vindication of the risky and novel dialogue process he initiated with the Mission around the 2006 report. During a meeting at the Embassy, Brahim Dahane, a prominent Sahrawi human rights activist with strong pro-independence leanings, called the report "balanced and useful" and an "accurate representation of the facts on the ground." M'Hammed Abdenebaoui, the number three person in the Ministry of Justice's hierarchy, called it "fair" on May 21. On May 23, a Norwegian diplomat said that his embassy used it to help shape policy considerations. Attendees at public events in Agadir and Casablanca at which Poloff spoke also generally praised the reports, but levied sharp critiques of the USG's Middle East policy in general, and the Guantanamo Bay Detention Center specifically.

## Broad Media Attention

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¶3. (U) The GOM and media organizations reacted quickly and positively to the Morocco and Western Sahara reports, although several stories questioned whether the U.S. had the "moral authority" to report on other countries' human rights records. Most coverage focused on Morocco's being named in the overall introduction as one of four countries that "stood out" internationally for having made progress in the field of human rights in 2007. Websites and blogs associated with the Western Sahara independence movement made much of the report's specific criticisms of the GOM's practices in the territory. Very few, if any, media outlets or speakers criticized the report itself, but used the document as a tool to make their respective political points. The Ambassador gave a live interview in French on the semi-independent 2M television station that received wide coverage in print media outlets. Since intensive attention throughout March, references to the report have dropped significantly, although it is still discussed sporadically in different contexts. Several articles made much of the report's focus on corruption as a major issue for Morocco to overcome in order to continue human rights progress.

## But Still Room for Improvement

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¶4. (C) Leaders of the Amazigh (Berber) movement complained to us in private meetings about the report's "non-existent" treatment of Berber issues related to political freedoms, freedom of assembly, and economic and social marginalization. Amina Bouayach, President of the Moroccan Organization for Human Rights (OMDH), a centrist activist organization not known for anti-government rhetoric, said that the 2007 Morocco report did not address the problem of physical mistreatment and "occasional torture" of detainees and arrestees by police in Morocco proper.

¶5. (C) The MOJ's M'Hammed Abdenebaoui cautioned against allowing the report to be instrumentalized by Salafists and Sahrawis, particularly in the area of prison conditions. He said that the two groups "twist" acknowledged and widespread deficiencies in the prison system that affect all inmates to make it appear that they have been singled out for mistreatment. They use the "human rights press, including your report" to gain warranted influence and privilege, he said. The same Norwegian diplomat, who said his embassy found the report useful, also suggested that the methodology and format depended too heavily on a "laundry list of incidents" and could benefit from comparative analysis between years as well as comments on overall trends.

¶6. (C) As a result of this input, in addition to our regular areas of human rights activity, in the next five months we will focus specifically on issues of torture and physical abuse by police outside of Western Sahara, corruption and prison conditions. We will also attempt to incorporate more information related to Berber concerns, when and where appropriate, in the 2008 report draft.

## Some Outcomes

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¶7. (C) On April 4, the King pardoned, and the GOM released, 17 members of the Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH) who had been imprisoned in 2006 for chanting slogans critical of the monarch on Labor Day (May 1) 2006. Their case figured prominently in the 2007 report and in our dialogue. The MFA's Bourita told us that the early pardon and release was a direct result of their having been featured in the report and discussed during the formal human rights dialogue between the Mission and the GOM. Separately, a high ranking official at the Ministry of Interior (MOI), known to be a hard liner not particularly accommodating on issues related to human rights in Western Sahara, told PolCouns that the message to "stop beating" was beginning to trickle down through the upper echelons of the MOI towards the ground

troops as result of mission lobbying, the Dialogue and the Western Sahara report. On May 29, another high ranking MOI official based in the territory told us that he had given orders for political arrests and beatings to cease. On the same day, a Laayoune-based human rights activist told us that "things were calmer than usual." A later trip by PolCouns to the territory during which he consulted with human rights activists seemed to confirm this anecdotal evidence. Additionally, following the deepening of our dialogue, the GOM has opened discussions with international NGOs such as Human Rights Watch.

#### Pending Issue

18. (C) During the January 2008 Human Rights Dialogue, we made clear our concern over seeming impunity for specific individuals in Western Sahara whose names consistently appeared in reports of abuses. We shared the names with the GOM and informed our interlocutors that, unless concrete steps were taken in the upcoming year to ameliorate the situation, we would have no choice but to publish the individuals' names and units in the 2008 report. In June 2008, we learned from civil society contacts that at least two of the named abusers have been transferred out of the territory. We have will continue to press this issue strongly with appropriate officials within the GOM.

#### Lessons Learned and Recommendations

19. (U) The 2007 drafting and dialogue process revealed several systemic weaknesses that we are working to address to improve the quality of the report, communications with the GOM, and internal information management.

1A. Scheduling Dialogue Meetings: The Government is committed to the dialogue process and, in fact, insists on having consultations prior to submission of the final draft to Washington. Nonetheless, we found it difficult to arrange a time, through our MFA interlocutor, at which representatives of all ministries were available to attend. The hierarchical nature of the ministries also made it difficult for our mid-level primary interlocutor to set and enforce a meeting time.

Mitigating Strategy: We are working with our MFA interlocutor to set and get approval for all three 2008 meetings in advance, rather than one at a time. Dates are tentatively set for late July, late October and early December

1B. Obtaining GOM Responses to Questions: The GOM responded in December to questions submitted in September and October, requiring substantial revision of the report draft on the eve of submission to DRL.

Mitigating Strategy: We have begun submitting questions to our MFA interlocutor for distribution to appropriate ministries on a quarterly basis. We will include the mission's Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP) drafter in all Human Rights Dialogue sessions in order to improve GOM responsiveness to TIP-related questions. We are also drafting an interim demarche to serve as a basis for discussion with the GOM and tracking of carry-over issues from 2007.

1C. Internal Information Organization and Tracking: The large volume of information on human rights issues the Mission receives on a continuous basis requires that planning begin far in advance of drafting.

Mitigating Strategy: In order to improve drafting efficiency for the 2008 report we created an electronic file of press clippings and human rights incidents and other information which we update on a running basis. We also created a simple database which captures the information and allows it to be sorted and printed under the appropriate subject and geographic category for use in all DRL congressionally

mandated reports. This system, which captures names and units of alleged perpetrators, serves as part of the Political Section's new Leahy vetting database, replacing the recently disabled Department-wide ACES application.

Comment

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¶10. (SBU) The generally positive response the 2007 report received from both the Government and activist communities seems to indicate that the formal human rights dialogue process has helped it achieve a reasonable degree of balance, accuracy and credibility. Most importantly, the report builds on, and encourages, Morocco's stated commitment to protecting human rights and has become a concrete tool to leverage improvement in this area. We will continue our results-oriented approach. At the same time, we believe that the criticisms we heard are valid and we will attempt to incorporate solutions into the 2008 draft. End Comment.

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